

Acromioclavicular (AC) Joint Sprain

Diagnosis Explanation:

An **AC joint sprain** (shoulder separation) occurs when the **ligaments connecting the clavicle (collarbone) to the acromion (top of the shoulder blade)** are stretched or torn, usually due to **a fall onto the shoulder, direct impact, or excessive overhead movements**. Severity is classified as:

- **Grade 1 (Mild):** Ligament stretching, mild pain, no deformity.
- **Grade 2 (Moderate):** Partial ligament tear, swelling, noticeable pain.
- **Grade 3 (Severe):** Complete ligament tear, visible shoulder bump, significant pain and instability.

Specific Work Modifications:

- **If your job requires standing or walking:** Avoid **carrying heavy objects on the affected side** and take breaks to rest the shoulder.
- **If your job involves lifting:** Avoid **overhead lifting, pushing, pulling, or reaching across the body**. Use **both hands for lifting** when possible.
- **If your job is desk-based:** Keep **shoulders relaxed**, use **proper arm support**, and avoid **hunched posture**.
- **Avoid:** Repetitive overhead movements, carrying heavy loads, and activities that strain the shoulder.

Specific Activity Modifications:

- **If you play sports:** Avoid **contact sports, throwing, and overhead motions** until fully healed.
- **If you do weightlifting:** Avoid **bench presses, shoulder presses, dips, and pull-ups**. Focus on **controlled, pain-free movements**.
- **If you do yoga or Pilates:** Modify poses to **avoid deep shoulder extension and overhead reaching**.
- **Avoid:** High-impact activities, heavy lifting, and sudden shoulder movements.

Recommended Supplements:

- **Collagen Peptides** - 10g daily for ligament and joint repair.
- **Vitamin C** - 500mg daily to support collagen synthesis.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin** - 1500mg/1200mg daily for joint health.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** - 1000mg daily to reduce inflammation.
- **Turmeric (Curcumin)** - 500-1000mg daily for pain relief.

Recommended Nutrition and Hydration:

- **Increase Lean Protein** (chicken, fish, tofu, eggs) to support ligament healing.
- **Eat Anti-Inflammatory Foods** (berries, leafy greens, turmeric, nuts) to reduce swelling.
- **Consume Hydrating Foods** (cucumber, watermelon, citrus) to maintain tissue hydration.
- **Limit Processed Foods & Sugars** to prevent inflammation.
- **Hydration:** Drink **8-10 cups of water daily** to support joint recovery.

Home Exercise Prescription (Rehabilitation for AC Joint Sprain)

Early Phase (0-2 Weeks, Reducing Pain & Swelling):

- **RICE Protocol** - Rest, Ice (15-20 min, 3x/day), Compression (sling if needed), Elevation.
- **Pendulum Exercises** - Lean forward, let the arm hang, gently swing in small circles, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Shoulder Blade Squeezes** - Pinch shoulder blades together, hold **5 seconds**, repeat **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Neck & Upper Trap Stretch** - Gently tilt head to the opposite side, hold **20 seconds, 3x/day**.

Strengthening Phase (2-6 Weeks, Improving Stability & Function):

- **Isometric Shoulder Holds** - Press palm against a wall without moving the shoulder, hold **5 seconds**, repeat **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Internal & External Rotation (Resistance Band)** - Keep elbow at **90 degrees**, rotate forearm inward and outward, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Wall Slides** - Stand facing a wall, slowly slide hands up, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Advanced Phase (6+ Weeks, Restoring Strength & Preventing Recurrence):

- **Lateral Arm Raises (Light Resistance)** - Raise arms to shoulder height, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Scapular Stability Exercises (Resistance Band Rows)** - Pull resistance band toward chest, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Modified Push-Ups (Wall or Knees)** - Maintain control, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Helpful Books:

1. *The Shoulder Pain Solution: Simple Exercises to Prevent and Recover from Injury* - John M. Kirsch, MD.
2. *Overcoming Shoulder Pain: A Guide to Rehabilitation and Recovery* - Peter T. J. Barrett.

Click here for more orthopedic patient information.

Contact a Key West orthopedic clinic or reach out to Dr. Jason Pirozzolo.